

CRESPAR

Research & Development Report

Talent Development Middle School "Removed from the List"

ONE PHILADELPHIA MIDDLE SCHOOL'S SUCCESS at improving its students' attendance, achievement, and promotion rates holds wide-ranging implications for other low-performing schools and the impact of comprehensive reforms.

Jay Cooke Middle School had such low test scores and so many students scoring below basic on state tests that it was flagged as failing and almost ready for state takeover in 1997. Three years later it was removed from the list of underachieving schools because of consistent and substantial achievement gains. Even before the state warned Cooke, it had voted to adopt the Talent Development Middle School (TDMS) reform model developed at Johns Hopkins University. With the great commitment of Cooke's faculty and administration and a comprehensive reform adapted to the school's needs, the high-poverty school assessed its problems and began to improve teaching, raise test scores, cut absenteeism, and promote more, and better-prepared, students.

Although these are significant accomplishments, Cooke plays a larger role in school reform, especially with the sanctions for schools that do not meet the standards for annual progress prescribed by the *No Child Left Behind* Act. "The gains in student achievement...show that schools of this type can substantially improve over a relatively short period of time," according to an article in this spring's issue of the *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* telling Cooke's success story. "Removed from the List: A Comparative Longitudinal Case Study of a Reconstitution-Eligible School" was the work of CRESPAR researchers Douglas MacIver, Allen Ruby, Robert Balfanz, and Vaughan Byrnes, all of Hopkins.

They used a quasi-experimental design, with a highly similar comparison school, to evaluate their middle-school model. TDMS began at Cooke in 1997 with full implementation of the language arts program, Student Team Literature, and a phase-in of the mathematics and science curricula. Other innovations included small learning communities, consistent and relevant professional development, and efforts to improve student behavior and attitudes.

The comparison school had a similar student population with slightly higher test scores in the two years immediately before Talent Development began. That changed as the reform took hold. From 1997 to 2001, the two groups of students that went through Cooke closed this achievement gap by the spring of seventh grade and students in the first cohort outscored students in the comparison school by 50 scale score points on the state reading tests for fifth- and eighth-graders. They also showed significant gains on the state math tests.

The authors stress that Cooke's accomplishments can be replicated. For schools attempting reform, "Cooke's results show that these efforts can lead to major improvements in student achievement... The Cooke case stresses focusing on the key functions of teaching and learning, using evidence-based ways of reform, and on making a strong commitment at

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TDMS raises achievement in Philadelphia

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY'S Talent Development Middle Schools (TDMS) schoolwide reform model is improving student achievement in 11 Philadelphia public middle schools, despite obstacles such as poverty and high teacher turnover.

The improvements are demonstrated by scores on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) standardized test. Almost every Philadelphia school that has used the Talent Development Middle School model for three or more years has experienced what the state defines as "educationally significant gains" of 50 points or more in at least one tested subject area. As a group, the Talent Development Middle Schools have improved test scores significantly more than control schools. They have also bested, by an even wider margin, the citywide average improvement for all middle schools.

Eighth-graders in seven Talent Development Middle Schools implementing the model for three to six years raised their schools' combined math and verbal PSSA scale scores by 55 to 215 points.

Students in four other Talent Development Middle Schools that have used the model for just one year increased their combined scores between 10 and 130 points.

Only 5 of Philadelphia's 26 high-poverty, high-minority schools had eighth-graders who earned a combined PSSA average of 2200 or higher in 2001; four of those schools were Talent Development Middle Schools. In 2002, 8 of the 14 high-poverty, high-minority

schools to break 2200 were Talent Development Middle Schools.

"Schools using the Talent Development Middle School model have substantially and consistently improved their achievement levels," said Robert Balfanz, a research scientist at the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR) at Johns Hopkins University. "Their gains have been twice as great in comparison to overall school district gains, and 20% greater than matched sets of control

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schools. It should also be noted that the longer schools have been implementing the model, the greater their achievement gains."

Four of the 11 schools, however, are

no longer using the Talent Development model. During a system-wide reorganization last year, Clemente, Shoemaker, and Tilden middle schools were turned over to private educational organizations, which chose to introduce their own reforms, while Roosevelt was assigned to a set of schools restructured by the school district.

Designed specifically to engage middle schoolers with a challenging yet nurturing learning environment, Talent Development Middle Schools is a whole-school reform model developed by researchers, educators, and experienced curriculum writers at CRESPAR. Philadelphia's Central East Middle School was the nation's first Talent Development Middle School. In Philadelphia, Johns Hopkins collaborators are the Philadelphia Education Fund and the School District of Philadelphia.

The model combines instructional, curricular, organizational and professional development reforms that are based on extensive research into what really works in middle schools. Students participate in hands-on classroom activities in every subject area. The model features small-group learning, extended class periods for core subjects, and extra-help electives in math and reading. Teachers participate in monthly after-school or Saturday sessions and receive weekly in-classroom feedback from curriculum coaches.

The Talent Development model is being used in 18 schools in 6 states: New Jersey, Louisiana, Washington State, Michigan, and Minnesota, as well as Pennsylvania. **G**

<i>School</i>	<i>Yrs in pgm</i>	<i>PSSA baseline</i>	<i>2001-02 avg</i>	<i>Change</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Yrs in pgm</i>	<i>2001 PSSA</i>	<i>2002 PSSA</i>	<i>Change</i>
Central East	6	2040	2255	+215	Tilden	1	2140	2270	+130
Cooke	5	2090	2260	+170	Lewis	1	2170	2220	+50
Beeber	5	2150	2250	+100	Vare	1	2170	2210	+40
Clemente	4	2045	2135	+90	Pierce	1	2190	2200	+10
Shoemaker	4	2005	2125	+120	Average		2167	2225	+58
Roosevelt	3	2135	2190	+55	District Average			2280	2310
Mansion	3	2090	2185	+95				+30	
Average	4	2079	2200	+121					
Control Schools		2066	2166	+100					
District Average			2232	22					
				95					
				+					
				63					

Tailored reforms could solve Black males' school problems

TWO POPULAR EDUCATION topics—high school reform and the achievement gap—converge in CRESPAR's *Cultural Issues Related to High School Reform: Deciphering the Case of Black Males* (Report 60) by Will Jordan and Robert Cooper. Arising from the discussion and merging of these two topics is the question, "What can be done within the context of school reform to improve the overall achievement and school success for Black male students?"

The authors concede that considering Black males "an endangered species" is not a new idea. In fact, Black males are persistently at risk not only of school failure, but also of "...infant mortality, poor public health, drug abuse, crime and legal problems, and unemployment," the report states. In schools, Black males are found time and time again on the low end of the achievement gap. "...Education statistics consistently reveal that Black males cluster at the bottom of the distribution of virtually every indicator of school failure, such as dropping out, absenteeism, suspension and expulsion, and low standardized test scores."

Although the authors cite instances where schools contribute to such failure, they also look to the schools, more than other institutions in society, to prevent, and help reverse, it. Schools are the one compulsory institution all Black males encounter, and furthermore, schools "should act as a vehicle of social mobility for poor and minority students, while simultaneously helping middle class students reproduce their social status. Good schools encourage at-risk students to surpass the level of education of their parents..." the authors state.

This is where school reform enters the picture. Comprehensive high school reforms introduce proven strategies and methods for improving the school climate and organization, instituting challenging curricula, and preparing and monitoring teachers. Such improvements should contribute to greater achievement by all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or social class.

They should also close the achievement gap between Black and White, as well as affluent and poor, students.

Reforms often do not, however, address cultural relevancy. Indeed, school reformers often believe that effective education should be "culturally neutral" and color-blind. There is, however, "new knowledge about the cultural relevancy and the education of Black adolescents." Much of this focuses on the race and cultural background of teachers, according to the report.

Within this debate over cultural relevancy or cultural neutrality lie two issues that the authors suggest could be helpful to the success of Black males in school. Neither is considered part of comprehensive high school reform. In fact, "the discourse on high school reform is occurring apart from new knowledge about cultural relevancy and the education of Black adolescents," they report.

These issues are the lack of attention to the cultural uniqueness of Black males and the relative shortage of Black male teachers," the report states. Increasing the number of Black male teachers in high schools would seem, on its face, to be one move in the right direction—giving students more people to identify with and to see as role models. The authors stress, though, it is just that and not *the* cure-all for the problems besetting Black males in America's schools.

The effect of more Black male teachers and a more culturally relevant curriculum on the achievement of Black male students is still to be determined. The authors conclude, in fact, with recommendations for further research, including involving Black male teachers in reform initiatives and merging the two bodies of research literature, which have not intersected frequently. G

Howard team develops curriculum tools

OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS, the Talent Development Secondary School Academic Team at Howard University has been developing curriculum enhancements for middle and high school students. Aligned with district standards, these tools are designed to connect academics with social skills and help students understand the transitions in their educational lives—from middle to high school, from high school to college and beyond. Key curriculum enhancements are:

Talent Development Info-Study Packet, a collection of strategies to help students learn study skills and time management. The packet also includes learning aids, such as a math glossary and punctuation and capitalization guidelines.

Reference Notebook, materials that support class assignments in core subjects. The notebook includes *How to Write a Research Paper*, *Science Project Guidelines*, *How to Prepare a Presentation*, *Map Skills*, a *Computer Glossary*, and *College Knowledge*, which increases students' awareness of college applications, scholarships, and internships.

These tools are research-based, culturally and contextually relevant, and designed to help students apply what they have learned by using hands-on manipulatives. Developed from teacher and student focus groups, classroom observations, and standardized test results, these tools are updated on suggestions from teachers, parents, and school officials.

The how-to handbooks have been implemented by two District of Columbia schools. The biggest challenge to implementation was achieving the buy-in of teachers and providing classroom demonstrations on how these tools can supplement daily lessons and serve as a resource in preparing students for standardized tests, said Deirdre Thompson, CRESPAR researcher, who developed the tools with graduate student Leslie Arthur.

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Direct Instruction wins high marks in a dual-reform project

DRAMATIC INCREASES in standardized test scores in mathematics computation, coupled with significant gains in reading comprehension scores stood out among the somewhat mixed results of a four-year study of an attempt to combine two reforms in six Baltimore City elementary schools.

Overall, the study found Direct Instruction, one of the reforms, to be a viable option for raising student achievement in reading and mathematics. Implementation of the other comprehensive reform, Core Knowledge, began only in the third year of the study, so results are inconclusive, though anecdotal evidence from teachers and focus groups was positive.

The Baltimore Curriculum Project: Final Report of the Four-Year Evaluation Study (CRESPAR Report 62) documents the results of a multi-method study of the two-tiered reform effort. The nonprofit Baltimore Curriculum Project (BCP) combined Direct Instruction (DI) and Core Knowledge to bring a proven reading-math program and a content-rich curriculum in literature, history, geography, science, and the arts to students in the poor-performing schools under its direction.

For the CRESPAR study by researchers Martha Mac Iver, Elizabeth Kemper, and Sam Stringfield, each of the BCP schools was demographically-matched with a similar school within the district as a reasonable control to which it could be compared.

The researchers followed two cohorts of students in the BCP and the control schools—students in either kindergarten or second grade during the 1996-97 school year (primarily in third and fifth grades, respectively, during 1999-2000). They conducted interviews with principals and DI coordinators, and focus groups with teachers during each

year of the study to gauge BCP-school staff perceptions of the innovation.

In the first three years of the study, detailed classroom observations were made in the BCP schools. Collected data provided evidence about the implementation and the classroom-level effects of the BCP curriculum. Classroom observations and interviews indicated that the DI curriculum and instructional methods were indeed implemented, though the developer noted that implementation did not proceed at the desired rate in kindergarten until the fourth year.

Core Knowledge implementation was not expected to begin until year 3, and proceeded more slowly than the DI implementation. Teacher surveys and focus groups found positive views of both DI and Core Knowledge, but also revealed some frustrations.

Analyses of achievement test data indicated mixed results for students, depending on their subject, grade level, and school.

In mathematics computation for the original kindergarten cohort, DI students moved, on average, from the 16th percentile at the end of first grade to the 48th percentile at the end of third grade (compared with growth among control counterparts from the 27th to 36th percentile over the same period). The impact on computation achievement for the original second grade cohort was nearly as strong.

On the other hand, while DI students improved somewhat in mathematics concepts achievement, they continued to score well below national norms and their control counterparts in mathematics concepts (26th percentile).

Students at DI schools also made considerable progress in reading over the four years. On the primary measure of reading comprehension, members of the original kindergarten cohort were, on average, reading at grade level (49th per-

centile) by the end of third grade (after scoring, on average, at the 17th percentile on the readiness pretest, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test). Members of the original second grade cohort were nearing grade level (40th percentile) by the end of fifth grade.

At the four schools with the highest rates of poverty and minority students, however, the average reading comprehension achievement was at the 38th percentile for the original kindergarten cohort and the 33rd percentile for the original second-graders. Students at control schools (where other curricula to improve reading achievement were being implemented) were achieving at the same level, so there were no significant differences between the outcomes for the two groups (controlling for demographics and pretest factors).

Though limitations of the study make causal interpretations problematic, the authors view these findings as evidence that Direct Instruction (implemented at comparable levels of developer support) is a viable whole-school reform for raising student achievement in reading and mathematics.

While the reform may not necessarily perform better than other curricular alternatives, there have been sufficient achievement gains to justify its continuation as a reform option. In schools where teachers have become heavily invested in the program and scores are rising, the researchers believe it is particularly important to continue implementing the reform, as change could be disruptive.

Based on the evidence from this study, the authors would recommend that schools consider Direct Instruction as one of several reform options aimed at boosting student achievement, and make their choices based on the needs of their students and the capacities and preferences of their teaching staffs. □

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Texas program meets need for English as a job skill

WHEN GARMENT FACTORIES in South Texas moved their operations into Mexico, many Spanish-speaking immigrants in the El Paso area lost their jobs. These displaced workers were eligible for federal aid for retraining, but community colleges, training schools, and other adult education centers were not prepared for these new students.

Most of them were Spanish-speaking Mexican immigrants, who knew little English because they had had no need to learn it. Many of them were women over 40, and most of them had little education and were not literate in their native Spanish. These displaced workers needed job skills, but they also needed language and literacy skills.

To meet this need, the Adult Bilingual Curriculum Institute was created (www.adultbilingualtraining.org). With a \$1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor and support from two local agencies, CRESPAR researcher Margarita Calderón and her colleagues in El

Paso designed a program to train teachers for adults with limited English proficiency who needed to enter, or re-enter, the workforce.

The project, "Training Instructors for Effective Bilingual Workforce Development," began in January 2001 at three sites with 18 teachers, who attended training once a week the following summer and monthly during the fall and winter. Program coaches also visited the teachers in their classrooms to offer support, suggestions, and follow-up. The initial phase concluded in May 2002 after a nine-month intervention. "We're very happy with the results," said Calderón.

Among the outcomes were workplace literacy classes that attracted more than 160 students, training sessions on Sheltered English Supervision for area employers, the production of training materials, such as handbooks for Spanish GED instruction, and curricula for Spanish-speakers being trained in a day-care center, and the identification of effective practices. More than half of the initial group

of teachers received additional training to become trainers of future instructors.

The curriculum institute is patterned after Success for All (SFA). Calderón is trying to adapt SFA's strategies to adult literacy in a setting that allows students to learn workplace skills while they learn English.

Given the limited financial support and length of the project, Calderón and her associates were not able to measure the program's effects on students through an experiment-control study. Rather, they used pre-post tests, teacher evaluations, instructor feedback, observations, and literacy patterns. She recommends, however, that comprehensive, five-year studies of the issues raised in this program be conducted, and that the program be adapted to other areas of the country with large numbers of non-native English speakers.

Lending support to the CRESPAR Department of Labor program were the Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce and the Upper Rio Grande Workforce Development Board. G

- # *Educating At-Risk Students* is a best seller—at least by the National Society for the Study of Education (NSSE) standards. The collection of research articles has sold more than 3,000 copies, making it one of the society's most successful volumes. Researchers from CRESPAR at Johns Hopkins and Howard universities, as well as those from the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE) at the University of California at Santa Barbara contributed, and the volume was edited by **Sam Stringfield** and **Deborah Land** at Hopkins.
- # *A History of US* finally made it to TV, if not always in prime time. PBS stations across the country aired the 16-part series, *Freedom: A History of US*, based on Joy Hakim's book series, for which CRESPAR curriculum writers have been developing teacher and student materials for several years. They also developed the on-line teacher guides and classroom materials that accompany the PBS series. These are available at www.pbs.org/historyofus.
- # **Steven Sheldon**, CRESPAR researcher with the School, Family, and Community Partnerships program, presented "School Programs of Family and Community Involvement in Children's Reading and Literacy Development" in April to an invitational conference at San Diego State University, co-sponsored by the International Reading Association and the Urban Partnership. Co-authored by Sheldon and **Joyce Epstein**, the paper reviews scores of studies indicating that family involvement in reading and language arts activities increases student achievement, and will be published in a book based on the conference.
- # JESPAR, *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk*, has a new look beginning with Vol. 8, No. 1. Thanks to managing editor **Kirsten Sundell**, the quarterly journal has a clean, fresh design and layout, and a web site to match (<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/jespar/index.htm>). This special issue, *Quest for Quality: An Evaluation of the City-State Partnership in Baltimore's Public Schools*, presents groundbreaking research and provides an overview of the results of the Westat evaluation of Baltimore schools, as well as two critical essays by guest editor Jennifer O'Day and James Cibulka on the meaning and impact of the study and the school system's reform efforts. Vol. 8, No. 2 features articles on Head Start, the impact of a curriculum-based instructional management system on math achievement, and promising reform designs.
- # A student of the late Sylvia T. Johnson of Howard University gave the second annual lecture in her honor on April 16. Norris Haynes, chairman and professor in the Counseling and School Psychology Department at Southern Connecticut State University, spoke on "Assessing Social and Emotional Intelligence." Howard University/CRESPAR established the lecture series in honor of the long-time researcher and educator, who died in 2001.
- # CRESPAR/Hopkins researchers **Sam Stringfield** and **Jeff Wayman**, from the Systemic Supports program, were among about 80 researchers and education practitioners invited to participate in the Harvard Graduate School of Education conference, "Scaling Up Success: Lessons Learned from Technology-based Educational Innovation." Stringfield and Wayman presented a paper on software that enables teachers and school staffs to use student data to improve achievement. Mary Yakimowski, officer for the Division of Research, Evaluation, Assessment, and Accounting for the Baltimore City Public School System, gave the practitioner's side of the issue.
- # Students in 9 classes in 7 Maryland middle schools are investing in their futures through Stocks in the Future. Designed to build interest and improve student achievement, the pilot program offers hands-on knowledge of business and the stock market and provides incentives for perfect attendance, by the week, and higher math and English grades. Students can earn up to \$80/school year to buy stocks that they can redeem at their high school graduations. The program is already paying dividends. For the first 2 quarters of this school year, students in this program attended school an average of 2.1 days more than those in control groups, and they were 2.3 times more likely than control students to have perfect attendance.
- # Using her book, *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools*, as the basis for her presentations, CRESPAR researcher **Joyce L. Epstein** spoke at the National Summit on Parent Involvement in Teacher Education late last year and at the Second Annual Family Involvement Institute in February. Epstein advised college and university professors on how to better prepare teachers and administrators to involve families and communities in their schools, as a means of increasing student achievement.
- # *The Journal of Negro Education* has made a great comeback, publishing 3 volumes in 18 months. *JNE* is current not only in its publication, but also in its selection of themes pertinent to the education of children from African American and other racial/ethnic minority groups. The last three volumes include thought-provoking articles on core issues, such as affirmative action in higher education, school reform, black women in higher education, special education, and juvenile justice, the subject of the Summer 2002 issue. Guest edited by Dr. Carol Yeakey, that issue includes her eye-opening article, "America's Disposable Children." The topic of African American children with special needs remains central to the journal's call for fairness. Through *JNE*, scholars have alerted the nation to the over-representation of African American children in special education classes, their under-representation in gifted education programs, and inappropriate and/or inadequate testing methods. G